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UNCLAS CARACAS 000458

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STATE FOR WHA/AND
AIDAC USAID/OFDA DCHA FOR MPOPP
NSC FOR CBARTON
HQ USSOUTHCOM FOR POLAD
SAN JOSE FOR USAID/OFDA TCALLAGHAN

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: DISASTER DECLARATION DUE TO FLOODING IN NORTHERN VENEZUELA

1. SUMMARY: Heavy rains have been falling throughout much of northern Venezuela for nearly three full days. Serious flooding has occurred in many parts of the country, primarily coastal areas, but also parts of the capital, Caracas. At least thirteen (13) people are reported dead, and upwards of 3,000 are reportedly homeless, and several roads, including the main artery for cargo transportation, are closed due to landslides. END SUMMARY.

2. Approximately 10.5 inches of rain fell on coastal Venezuela between February 7 and 9, and the rain continues to fall. The President of Venezuela, Hugo Chavez, signed a decree on February 9 declaring a state of emergency in 6 states (Aragua, Carabobo, Miranda, Vargas, Falcon and Yaracuy) and the capital district of Caracas. The central government has set up a committee to oversee all of the disaster relief in the country. There has been no formal request for assistance from the GOV; Post believes that the GOV will not object to a donation directly to the Red Cross.

3. The Ambassador has determined that the flooding is of sufficient magnitude to warrant USG assistance, and is exercising his disaster assistance authority as per 2 FAM sections 060, 061 and 062.

4. Post therefore requests that OFDA provide \$50,000, which will be provided to the Venezuelan chapter of the International Red Cross, which will be used to purchase oral rehydration equipment, hygiene kits, and drinkable water.

5. Given the magnitude of the situation, and the forecast for rain to continue intermittently for at least 24 more hours - some forecasts predict 6 more days - in the affected areas, it is possible that we may request additional funding. Even if the rain should stop or slow in those areas, continued rain in other areas could increase flooding in the already affected areas. We also anticipate that the number of homeless may be somewhat higher already. We will remain in contact with the OFDA office in San Jose.
Brownfield

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